To: Mrs. Powell Green, an orphan

Nov. 5, 1943

My Father's World

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MY FATHER'S WORLD

Stacher

MERTON S. RICE 1872-1943.

This is my Father's world,
And to my listening ears,
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.
—MALTBIE D. BABCOCK

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MY FATHER'S WORLD
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WAR EDITION

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To all who love

THE ARCHITECT

"Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas"

Foreword

THE phrase of Maltbie Babcock's exultant song chosen for the general title of this little volume seems to sum up perfectly the impressions made upon me as I have wandered about watching and listening to the many evidences of a divinely made and divinely possessed world. I am not a scientist, and make here no claim to scientific authority. I am only a humble observer of the ordinary things wherein may be seen the handiwork of divine genius, and whereon may be discerned the autograph of God's presence.

—MERTON S. RICE

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I

"This Is My Father's World"

I. "This Is My Father's World"

SOMEWHERE in my reading I found a verse of four lines which set music in my soul, and rings, and will:

> I need not shout my faith. Thrice eloquent
> Are quiet trees and the green listening sod;
> Hushed are the stars, whose power is never spent;
> The hills are mute: yet how they speak of God! [1]

The silent eloquence of nature!

I make no claim to whatever qualification may ordinarily be considered essential for one who would pose as a guide to nature. In my own love of nature I can get along without a guide, as satisfactorily as I can get along without a butler in my home. I want neither. I want to feel my way alone. I would much rather be lost in the deep wilderness than have a guide tell me how to go. Many a day I have been lost in the wilds, but I had as good a time as when I was found; everything looked just the same save for roads, and I never did think roads were favored places to meet God's big outdoors.

By the widest allowance I would not lay claim to classification as a scientist, though my all too little education has majored that

[1] Charles Hanson Towne.

way, and the natural bent of my attention, influenced by my father who loved with a native love the things of the outdoors, has been evidenced from my childhood days in natural, if untrained, interest in the world about me.

My father's earliest influence upon my life was his explaining to me the star in the sky, or the flower of the field, or the bugs and the bees and the butterflies that flew and crawled across my path. Once he took me on the train—a thing I enjoyed only on rare occasions—to spend a day digging in a shalebank and along the interesting bed of a dried-up creek in search for crinoid heads. He held me in his arms when I was but a wee lad to tell me the story of the lightning and the crashing thunder. We had them abundantly in my prairie home. He took all fear of them out of me, and planted in the place of shrinking dread an eager appreciation of the beauty and majesty of the vivid flash and resounding roar of the storm. To this day I love a thunderstorm.

My father bought books about nature for me, and helped me to detect the manners and habits of the birds and the bugs and the snakes, the fascination of the flowers and trees, and the texture and derivation of the rocks. I did not then suspect that any other thought was in his mind than the sheer interest he could stir in me. I now suspect—and I confirm my suspicion by the fact that none of his children ever cared to spend their time on the streets of our little home towns—that he had a plan of winning us away from the unhealthy conversations and associations all too common along the streets of our towns. Whatever his plan may have been, he did direct my interest to the open fields, and along the river's way, where I am sure God was, and is, more opportune and natural for a boy.

The great ocean of the sky—all the ocean available for a prairie-

reared lad—I saw crowded with the ever-shifting argosies of clouds sailing away to their unknown ports. I came to love the sky profoundly, as I have been told the dwellers beside the sea come to love the sea. The sky was my sea. Across it swept the storms that set awe in my soul. Upon it spread the gorgeous sunsets, and up out of it came the hopes of sunrises. The sky was my sea.

Somewhere there is an account of a stumbling fellow who found some money one day along his path. When he spied it there, he eagerly grabbed it up in an aroused wonder as to how much money up to that moment he had actually missed because he had been looking too far away. He resolved as he clutched his little dime that from that day on he would keep his eyes focused upon the path he trod. In his old age he resorted to the doubtful effort of making a trial-balance of all his findings. He found that down the years he had picked up thousands of buttons, more thousands of pins and nails, a few pennies, a miserly disposition, a curvature of the spine, and a few other small matters. But he had missed the sky, the stars, the treetops, and the great lifting mountains. As for me, I have doubtless stumbled over whatever money there may have been lying in my path. I am not sure there was any there; I am only sure I found none. But I have seen the stars, and the sheen of the moon on the sea, and the way of a bird in the air. Keep your money!

I have been much in the far-flung wilderness alone. I do not mean in the lovely little groves of woods as we have them all across our cultivated countrysides—wee oases of refreshment on our wearied ways. There is a lure to me in the silent wilderness. I cannot resist it. In the fastnesses of untroubled forests I have many times clambered by difficult ways through the thick-inter-

grown brush and over the ancient trunks of fallen trees just to get to an actual spot whereon I was reasonably sure no other human being ever had been—to sit where no one else had ever sat. I spend so much of my time sitting in seats that have long been polished by much sitting of other sitters that I find a genuine relish when I am sure I am seated where no other one has ever sat. There is a verse in the Bible from which I have found preachment apt for such a day as ours, the verse being an experience in helpful interest: "I sat where they sat." All of which I too have done. I have also sat where they did not sit. I have sat there wholly for my own sake. Sitting so, I have found some of the most impressive moments of my much-interfered-with life of meditation. I do not know that I have ever thought out any very important thoughts anywhere, but for the determination of the true perspective of myself that coveted loneness in the wilderness has been most conducive.

No books go along when I want to be with nature. In the study I hold constant companionship with my books. It is painful to me to see the vacant niche on the shelf from whence one of these companions is gone. I am enamored of my books in the study, and I go there in a never-disappointed expectancy. But I do not care to search for some page 19 in an explanatory book when I hear a sound or see a flash of color. Emerson has put it in one of his poems, which wears such a name as to have forbidden wide familiarity, "Waldeinsamkeit," in these four fine lines:

> See thou bring not to field or stone
> The fancies found in books;
> Leave author's eyes, and fetch your own,
> To brave the landscape's looks.

We miss much in nature going stumbling along with our eyes

on the pages of a guidebook. It is quite like seeking audience with a stranger by a letter of introduction. Never mind that; out with yourself! If the man you seek audience with is worth your knowing, he will sense your real value beyond the estimate of some other who knew little about you anyhow. You are enough to take along when you go for a sojourn with nature. Go yourself! Listen yourself! Look yourself! You may hear or see something no guidebook has ever noted. It has not all been heard or seen. Anyhow you have not been along there.

When Linnaeus went out the gates of Upsala in 1732, carrying in his pocket a passport for Lapland from the governor, it was the dawn of modern science after the long night of the book-ridden Middle Ages. Linnaeus was the first explorer for science who was brave enough to go alone to nature itself; carrying his own notebook he proceeded to make his own observations. Someone has well said, "It is no wonder that as he rode north the very larks burst into song." He may have been keener than any of us, but his process is open to every one of us.

To be sure, you should have made preparation of yourself before going. Your eyes should have been trained to see. Your ears should have been keened to hear. Your appreciation should have been drilled to catch whatever you might come in reach of. You remember how one day when a voice from heaven spoke out to a crowd of folks about Jesus, some thought "it thundered"; so the Bible notes their dull hearing. A dullard will go wading through measureless glories and see nothing. A man once told me he had spent a month in Jerusalem, and the only thing he could remember having seen was a dogfight. You yourself are a real issue as you walk about your Father's wonderful world.

The poem hangs on the berry bush
When comes the poet's eye.[2]

Hundreds of butchers and bakers and candlestick makers have gone blundering through berry-patched ways all their lives and have never found a poem. You are an issue in the way you go.

I have often made a comparison of my very dear friend, William A. Quayle—a veritable vagabond with God along the poem-packed way of his going—and what has been said by some critic of George Meredith. Someone measured the way of Meredith with nature as the findings of one moved by intuition rather than erudition. He did not learn the secrets of nature by a searching course of scientific study and research, nor by a vast accumulation of catalogued information. He always seems to come walking familiarly right out of the very heart of nature itself, bearing in his own intuitive realization the secrets that have been concealed from others. However true this may have been of George Meredith, it was pre-eminently evident in William A. Quayle. He knew nature as a friend knows a friend, not as some student would analyze it. He came to know himself the better in such companionship. We get honest with ourselves when we are alone with nature, and become impressed that we are never less alone than when we are alone, for at such a realization we become strangely conscious of God.

There is a line of Sidney Lanier's which always abides deep in the soul of the reader of the beautiful verses, "The Marshes of Glynn." In the midst of the poem, as though he had waded out into the lone place of a lonesome marsh, he places his bold word:

And belief overmaster doubt, and I know that I know.

[2] W. C. Gannett.

"This Is My Father's World"

God is always about me when I can be in his great outdoors. This is a God-made world. Everywhere and all the time that fact looms impressively. There is no turn of the calendar that can change that fact. There is no location on the globe that can escape it.

He that hath eyes to see, let him see! He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!

"This is my Father's world."

II

"Of Rocks and Trees, of Skies and Seas"

II. "Of Rocks and Trees, of Skies and Seas"

ONE day, during a visit to a state prison, when I was under the suffocating sense of being shut off from the open world that stretched invitingly away from such confinement, the singing of a hymn did a great thing for my soul.

Those great gray walls did not appear to be in any conspiracy of song. The whole scene suggested a dirge, if any music should be attempted. The formal lock step of the condemned men, as they marched in their directed way, hardly seemed the tread that would beat tunefulness into or out from the human heart.

Because of some such a feeling that was on my spirit as I watched them come silently in, I asked the chaplain if the men would sing. He assured me they would, and wanted to know what song I should like.

Any song amid such surroundings would command attention, it seemed to me. In the great open court of the prison plot I saw the birds flying freely about, singing in their accustomed joyfulness, for the freedom of their wings presumed upon the access of the open sky above them.

I suggested that the men should select their song. They shouted, almost in unison, upon the offer for a choice of song. I

Photo by Ewing Galloway, N. Y.

remembered, as they eagerly responded, how some prisoners of old—musicians they were too—could not sing even under the urgent pressure of those who wanted to hear a song, but hung their silent harps upon the willows and sat down and wept.

The call of the prisoners was for a hymn I had never till that moment heard, "This Is My Father's World." And they sang!

To hear men sing in prison Maltbie Babcock's beautiful hymn was an experience that not only never will be forgotten, but set the song at once deeply in my appreciation. I wonder if Maltbie Babcock ever heard men in prison sing his hymn. I wonder if he ever thought how it would sound there.

Little did I care how musically imperfect the voices of those men might be. There was rare tone in the setting. No accompaniment by orchestra or a great organ could ever have set the song so. Shut in by huge, high walls of grim limitation, the prisoners sang out of, and away from, their surroundings. They sang "of rocks and trees, of skies and seas." I have never heard a song break out of prison as did that song.

"This is my Father's world!" None but he would or could have made it. He never let the contract to the cheapest bidder. It has been built, if such a word can be used of God, extravagantly. There is an overplus everywhere. No signs of skimping in God's workmanship. What we in the close limitations of our compelled economy would call wastefulness has nevertheless been the basis upon which coming ages could live. He has truly gone before us with his goodness, as seen in the vast stores of coal laid up in an ancient extravagance which to any other than God would have seemed a waste. He was making provision for a long future.

God's hand is forever outreaching the dictation of necessity. He could have made a world to function practically on a much

cheaper plan. Why make flowers in all the colors of a rainbow, when they could have done their work and reproduced their kind clad in pale drab and trimmed in scant petals?

But this is my Father's world, and his hand shaped all the wonders whose numbers we are multiplying in our realization with every discovery to aid our insight, till we are as confounded with his workmanship in the exhaustless realm of the minute as we are in the boundless sweep of the vast.

I preached a sermon which I called "God-Much," based on the familiar and much-used text, "My cup runneth over." I was trying in my interpretation of it to note the fact that what to any of us might seem to be an extravagance, because of our limited supply, to God, and to God alone, may be the compulsory overflow of an unconfined and incomputable abundance. With God all the meaning of compulsory economy is gone. The overflow of God is not wastefulness. It is rather the evidence of the incapacity of all else so much as to contain him.

"My cup runneth over!" I look up from the dripping sides of this little cup of mine to the God-much of my Heavenly Father. Just barely enough never does seem enough to me. It would be a skimpy measure in which to think of God. Whenever you begin to talk about God, you will have to face the sure runover of all limited things. That is not extravagance. It is God. And extravagance and economy are little words of a human vocabulary that do not fit God. The overabundance of God is in evidence everywhere in his world. It is one vast display of the God-much of creation.

Things I do not require, but do delight in, are all about me in my Father's world. My appreciations of life are constantly reminding me of the things I possess which are beyond the rigid

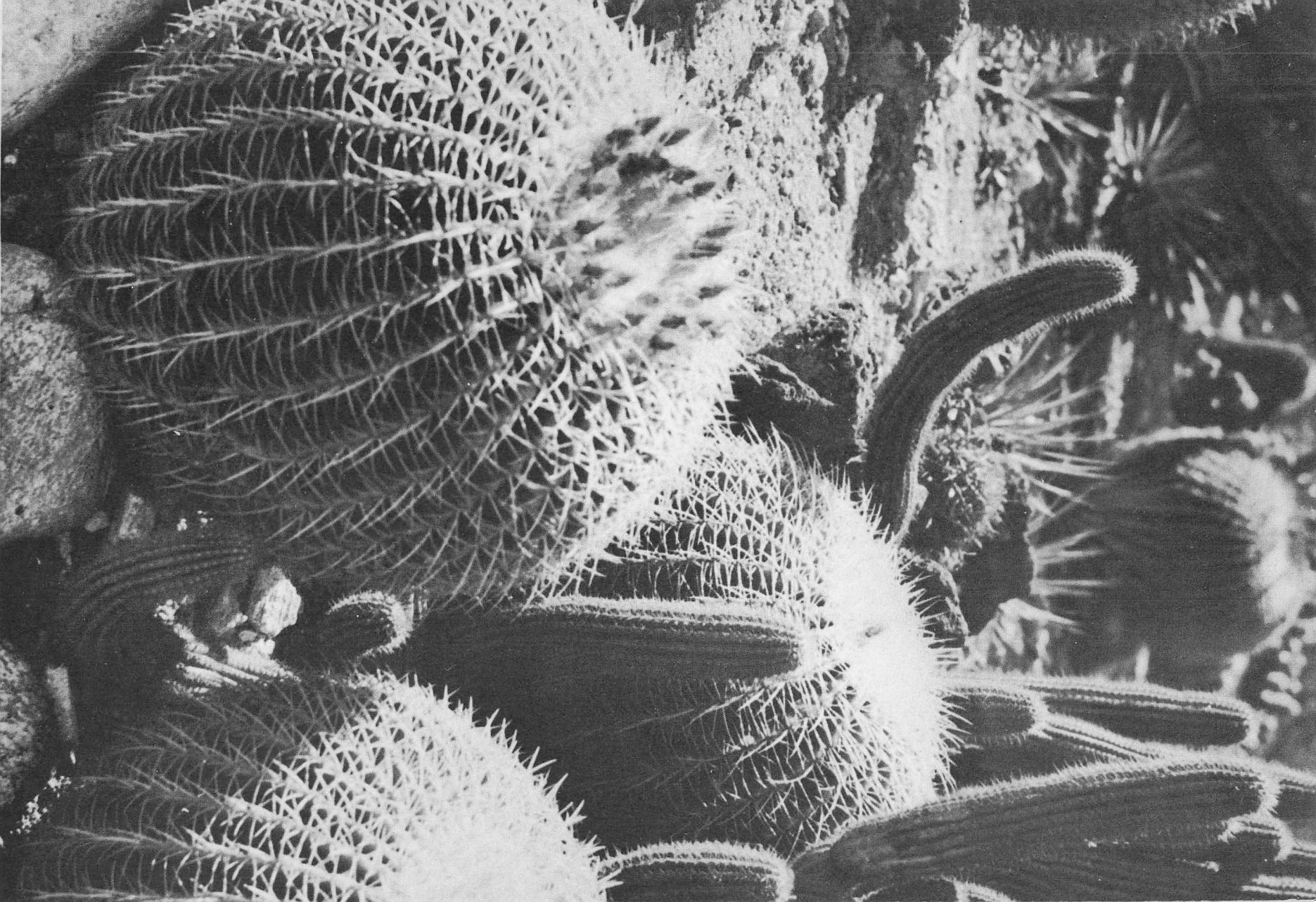
bounds of necessity. I cannot confine God to so short a tether as the necessitous. He scatters with a full hand.

Charles F. Kettering, one of the world's most interesting observers today, has spent a fortune, and is spending more, trying to find out why grass is green. It is indeed an interesting quest. I am glad he is seeking it out. I have neither money nor sense enough to be able to find it out. When he does find it out, however, I shall wonder why a violet is purple, and a forget-me-not is blue, and a pansy just any and every color.

I have oftentimes tried to think of a world that could function and yet be much less than this world is. But this is my Father's world, and he just couldn't be God and make a world on economic and dull terms. My cup, my world, my universe, is a runover.

III

The Way of Beauty



III. The Way of Beauty

WHEN man works, stand back! When God works, draw near! The absolute mastery of detail belongs to God.

I was in a great art gallery, whose walls were hung with the treasures of human genius, as men, called artists, had brought their pictures there. I stepped close to a blazing canvas which wore the name of one of the great, that I might, in satisfaction of my own curiosity, mark the tracings of his brush. The kindly guide, who pitied my evident ignorance of such things, ventured to offer the assistance of his knowledge of the art hung there and said, "Sir, if you desire to see the picture at its best you must stand back," and suggested some particular spot whence the best view was to be had. I thanked him and assured him I was not looking for any particular degree of good or bad as to art; I was only looking for the picture as it was, and was just then looking for brush strokes.

If you would see the works of man at their kindest best, you must stand back far enough to miss the marks of his coarse brush. If you would however see God's workmanship, you cannot come too close to mar the perfection of detail.

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies;—

Photo by Ewing Galloway, N. Y.

> Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
> Little flower—but if I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is.[1]

That famous little word, addressed to a flower, has found echo everywhere in human hearts. We have all felt just so. We have always believed such a verse as that should be written. It is universal poetry, and we were simply confirmed in our expectation when we found Tennyson seemingly to have dropped it in his poetry in a quite disconnected manner.

Such a verse needs no connection anyhow. It is its own connection, and seems to be a universal fit. We had never been able to give it correct statement, but we felt just that way about the flower we plucked from wall, or roadside, or hillside, glen or garden. That little schoolteacher was forever bringing us to God.

The poet's familiar lines are universally true. They are not confined to a flower. A blade of grass will do the same thing for us. An insect's wing, a bird's feather, the complex beauty spread across a butterfly's wing, the lens of a spider's eye—all come eloquently proclaiming the same truth.

This is God's world! As Phidias so skillfully wrought his name into the shield of his great masterpiece, Pallas Athene, that it could not be removed without destroying the shield, so God with infinitely more art has wrought himself into the world he has made.

God is the original artist. Man is a copyist. The very curves we entangle in design are curves we have found in the beauty of nature's own art. We have learned our fairest combinations of angles and arcs from the bells of flowers and the endless patterns of the leaves. The graceful fleur-de-lis, the bold jonquil, the delicate clematis, the supreme tracery of the maiden's-hair fern, the

[1] Tennyson.

rugged thistle, the modest gentian, the retiring violet, the frank, open glory of the daisy, the expectant concealment of a rosebud have all compelled the pencil of the designer to follow in their way, until we can trace the way of the copyist in frieze of marble as well as in design of delicate lace. All our human artists are mere imitators—

> What's most theirs is not their own,
> But borrowed in atoms from iron and stone,
> And in their vaunted works of Art
> The master-stroke is still her part.[2]

Then there is color. When Mr. Kettering finds out someday why grass is green, I can still but wonder about more than chemistry in the answer. My father loved the color red. He thought red was the one real color. He was no Communist; but had he been making it, he would have made a red world, and the great scientist would now be experimenting to find out why grass is red. Personally green is all right with me.

Color has been one of the age-long efforts of human art to attain in a fadeless pigment. How and where can I find a blue that will not fade? A green that will stay green? I saw a sign advertising a paint with a patent name involving the permanence of white. It kept its caretaker busy repainting the white part to save it from a mockery of the product it sought to promote. Age has forever been blowing a withering breath across our colors.

Recently there have been discovered some brilliant colors that have glowed with the native beauty in which they were spread for a term of years just as many as any of you may care to make calendar for. Age figures assigned to our physical world seem to be a free-for-all guess anyhow. You can satisfy all your own scruples

[2] Emerson.

in setting the date of the so-called Permian period of geologic time. A few million years on either side will make no difference whatever. Of one thing we may be sure, it was some time ago. In the geologic chapter of this world's story known as the Permian period, some wings of insects, quite like the wings of butterflies as we know them today, were laid away as you have put petals of flowers to press between the leaves of a book. Long ages ago those specimens were laid there. Recently a geologist was turning through those leaves as they were left exposed down in New Zealand and found some amazingly beautiful colors, lovely flashes of unfading pigment across the ages as brilliant as the day they were laid there.

I suppose God could have made a world of ugliness. But he did not. He is the God of loveliness in tone, color, form; and when he said as he made it, "It is good," he set there an assurance for the discovery of wondering mankind—and forever.

IV

The Way of Law

IV. The Way of Law

MY Father's world is a world of law. This is a world in a universe of law. There is no anarchy in nature. If the law breaks, the whole structure falls.

During a fascinating conversation in the laboratory of a really great scientific genius, that eager experimenter and profound observer of phenomena with which he was constantly in inquiry said, "Everything we do must be in strict recognition of, and deference to, law. If we break one of the most delicate laws of action, we are compelled to make correction before we can proceed."

The failure of many experiments has been due to the fracture of some obscure law the experimenter has not so much as known. On the other hand, many of nature's secrets have been discovered when experiments for other purposes varied from expectation because of a previously unknown factor. Even to the discovery of planets never before seen by mortal eye and making unforeseen registry when left out of the calculations of the astronomer, this insistence of law has held sway.

This is a universe of law. We do not make it so by enactment of some decrees we have agreed upon; we discover it to be a fact. Newton, Copernicus, Pasteur, Kelvin, Edison, Kettering have not

Photo by Ewing Galloway, N. Y.

been in the business of making laws. They have been finding out how certain laws work, and they have been able to bring to us explanations of phenomena whereby we may align our needs with the helpfulness of the actions of those laws. There is not one thing, however small or large, within the broad sweep of the universe that can escape the bondage of law.

The star that swims in the boundless ocean of farthest space and the flashing dewdrop pierced by the emerald point of a blade of grass on my lawn of a morning are prisoners of law. The man who mounts his most modern machine—increasingly modern we call it, because he has incorporated some new laws his predecessor knew not and thus outwings the winds—and the sluggish clod which is turned in the field by the snout of the swine seeking food are alike holden of law. Electron or nebula, God's great hand in law holds them all. It is the great unbroken, unbreakable word that God alone can write.

A new science is just now making its appearance which men are calling "petrofabrics." It is founded upon the crystalline structure of rocks, which reveals, as by frozen motion, the sure clue to how they were made. The direction, magnitude, and nature of the great forces that formed the earth as we now know it may thus be traced. Each tiny crystal has its own special line, as revealed under the microscope, showing the direction of the force which entered into the construction of the particular place where that crystal lay. It is but a new clue discovered in minutest detail of the omnipresence of law. It is as real in the limitless detail of the realm of the minute as it is in the exhaustless expansion of the realm of the vast.

All this puts for me a strange and fascinating flavor in the unknown. It does not confound me; it the rather confirms my ex-

pectation and furnishes me with an increasing sense of freedom in a world where I can always be sure life will never become commonplace. There is no chance for claustrophobia in a universe like this. The more we know the greater our conviction of ignorance. It requires knowledge to realize our ignorance. The wise man knows he knows but little. The ignoramus is a fool in his own conceit.

Our dictionaries, which in some ways are our most presumptuous volumes, come limping along in need of constant revision these days. When I moved to Detroit, the large dictionary I had on my desk beside me for consultation did not have the word "automobile" in it. I never let the town know it, and the first book I bought was the latest dictionary. It was soon in need of revision. The volume you have on your desk now can likely be made to look useless in your inquiry for information in the fields of the immediate explorations of knowledge. Turn into your dictionary and look for "neutron" or "positron." Don't throw your outrun dictionary away, but realize that the things these strange words are coined now to express were absolutely unknown to the most advanced scientist but a few months ago.

This is God's world, and his way is the way of law.

V

The Way of a Bird in the Air

V. *The Way of a Bird in the Air*

IF the air was not made for the birds, the birds were made for the air. There is a convincing adaptability in nature everywhere, and it is nowhere more evidenced than in the way of a bird in the air. You could tell, even if you never had seen a bird before, that he was made for the air.

When men began seriously to study some way by which they could lift their wearied, stumbling feet from the toiling ways of a clod-bound world and set their courses across open skies, they began at once to consider the skill and the equipment of the birds of the air. To "mount up with wings as eagles" meant more than a mere yearning; it meant also that there was a secret of that mounting to be discovered in those wings. There go the birds!

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard" had no more adaptable meaning to the careless, planless, shiftless fellow, than "wings as eagles" had to those who were weary of laying out roads, and toiling over mountains, and sailing stormy seas. There go the birds!

With scientific hunger and determination men began to study the eagle. They studied other many-mannered fliers and soon found out how the same act of flight through the air can be accomplished in about as many different ways as there are species of

fliers to be found. Bird, bat, bug, and butterfly, as well as the bee, and numerous other brethren, each seems to practice a different sort of process; but each finds skillful success in the purpose of his own flight. So after commendable study and comparison, man worked out for himself his own way also, and mounted up on his own wings in a manner to make eagles wish and wonder.

One of the most brilliant poems that has slipped from recent pens was struck off by a young American flier by the name of John Gillespie Magee, Jr., aged nineteen years, a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force, who scarce shaped his sonnet ere death dashed him from the sky. All through the rare verse he has set the phrases of "High Flight" in terms of man's individual victory on his own wings. He speaks of how he has "slipped the surly bonds of earth," and "joined the tumbling mirth of sun-split clouds" and "topped the wind-swept heights . . . . where never lark, or even eagle, flew." All the way through his fascinating verse he is under the influence of the wings of the birds as he tells of the high superiority we have built. There go the birds!

From the earliest days of my observation of the interesting things of nature, my father taught me to watch the way of a bird in the air. It would be better said, I am sure, the ways of the birds, for the differentiation of their ways is telltale of their identification.

The skillful watcher of birds does not need the minute description of some patient Audubon as to color and song in order to make his identification. The way of a bird in the air is a signature written across the sky, as sure as the signature of your own handwriting before an expert's eye. There are no counterfeits in their signatures either. No lazy-flapping crow ever signs across the sky

like a whirring partridge, and no partridge will ever be mistaken for a gull. There go the birds!

The straight line of the laboring wings of the quail, the difficulty of whose flight compels the economy of directness, and the lazy extravagance of the great wheeling circles of the masterful buzzard, who can literally float all day long without the flapping of a wing, present two contrasting signatures across the sky that cannot be mistaken.

What flourish in signature has the nighthawk as he goes his darting way in all the extravagance of his overwinged ease, to remind me of the flourishing signature of a writing teacher I once had who seemed to think the skill of a penman consisted in the concealment of that which he wrote.

The flight of a hummingbird is a confounding fact for the makers of airplanes as they seek for some method by which rapid flight can be had without the peril of fast landing. The humming wings of our smallest bird are so skillful as upon the slightest change to speed the tiny body forward or hold it suspended and still while thirst is quenched from the fragrant roadside cup of the most delicate flower. Who would ever expect the laboring sparrow, who seems always barely to make the height of its perch on a low housetop, to write its line across the sky with the stencil stroke of the hummingbird?

We have a phrase which has been so long used as to be accepted in its implied meaning as descriptive of one of our commonest birds. Whoever first said "as the crow flies" I do not know. Nor do I know whether he was trying to accuse or accredit the crow. The world, however, for long has made of the phrase the very pattern of directness and has thus attributed an undeserved compliment to one of the most wandering and meandering of all the

birds. A crow will stop anywhere and turn in any direction in that evenly beating motion of his black wings. The trained eye can detect him by his flight as far as he can be seen.

The real straight line is drawn from horizon to horizon by the duck. He always impresses you with the idea that he is going somewhere. When he arrives, he can spend his time swimming and diving in a school-boy-on-vacation sort of a way, but in the air he is an ambassador.

The black martins exult on the wing. Undisputed masters of the air, they seem to rest themselves in the confident buoyancy of their wings. They eat and drink as they fly. They write their names with a Spencerian flourish that every watcher of birds can identify.

The blackbird, the robin, the pigeon, the flicker, the canary, the lark, the gull—it would require a chapter to tell the way of each. The sky is a parchment of God, and the birds write across it their varied signatures.

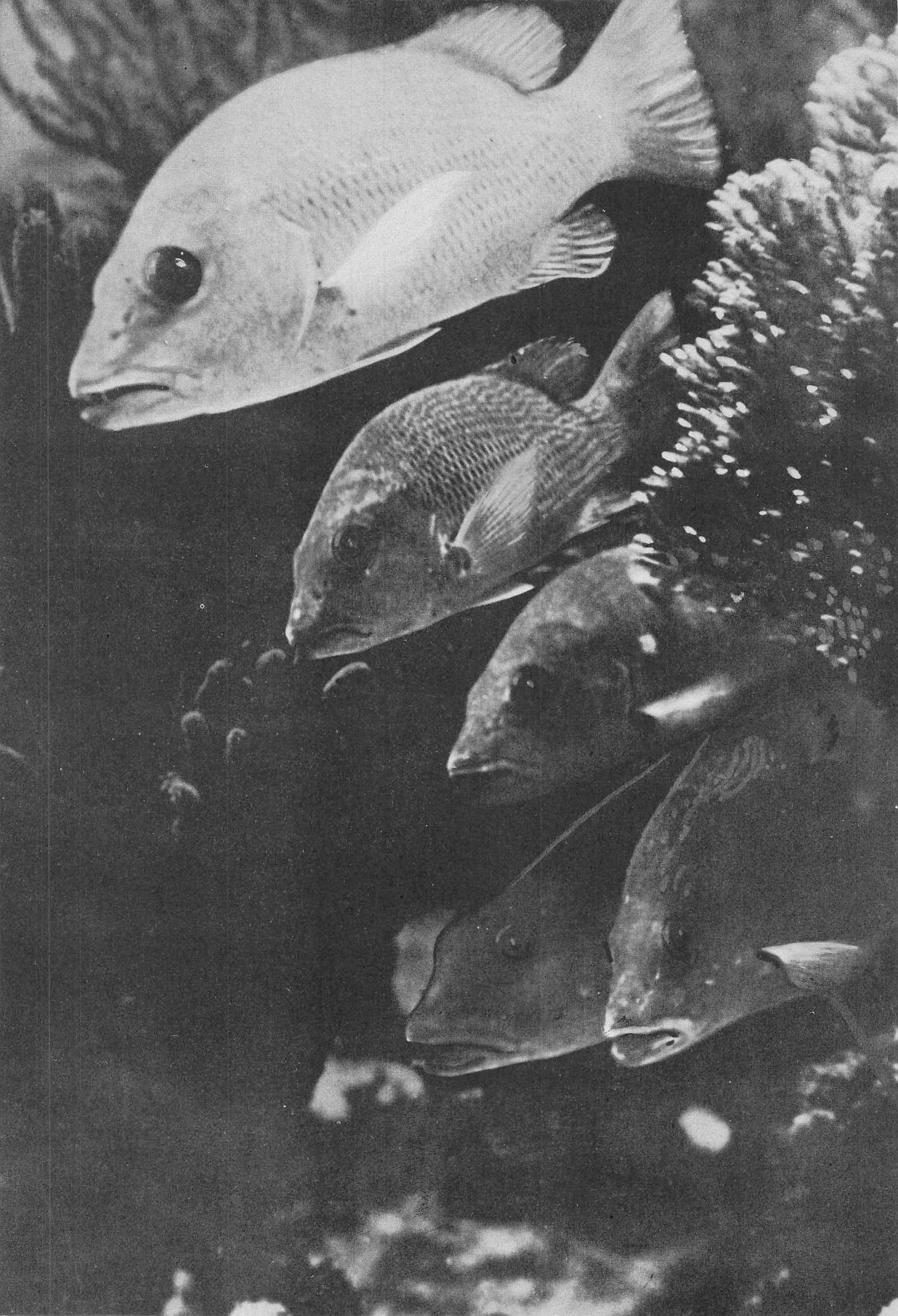
> Running upon the morning, with no sound,
> The hawk inscribes geometry in air;
> The curve he made ascending from the ground
> Froze into space as it was plotted there.
>
> Beneath the compass of his wings appear
> Such fabulous designs as children make:
> He wheels above the dark, untidy sphere
> With arcs like sequins glittering in his wake.
>
> All order is implicit in his flight;
> This is the sketch from which all wonder grew.
> He soars: the world spins down and out of sight;
> And space is curved. But this he always knew.[1]

There go the birds!

[1] Edward Weismiller, "Mathematician," *Harper's Magazine,* October, 1937, p. 479.

VI

The Way of a Fish in the Water



VI. The Way of a Fish in the Water

NOWHERE in all nature is the axiomatic adaptability of it any more evident than in the fitness of a fish in the water. It is one of those eloquent facts of nature which confirm our faith in an overseen fitness of things. There is something about a fish that, had the first man who ever saw one found it floundering about on the top of a high hill, would have made the amazed finder look about for some water to put it in. A fish fits the water.

We landlubbers have framed a phrase which we reserve for application to someone whose manner seems to be even less graceful than our own; we speak of him as being as awkward as a fish out of water. It is well said, and for good reason. I have wondered often at the observations the fish must make when any of us go splashing into the water. I would not eliminate from the application of my illustration, either, all or any of the so-called fancy divers and swimmers of our day of overdrawn amphibian endeavors. We were not made for water, and all the artificial strokes we can train ourselves into wear a telltale awkwardness. There is a way of a fish in the water.

When I was a little lad, I counted it my top pleasure to get away alone beside an unhurrying river where the sunfish lay lazily wait-

Pinney Science Photo from Black Star, N. Y.

ing in the coveted shadow of a leaning old sycamore tree wherein a redbird sat whistling his shrill song. I think now there should be placed a protection on sunfish limiting their taking to boys under thirteen. I rather suspect God had a boy in mind when he made a sunfish. Anyhow, the way of a sunfish in the water is exactly suited to a boy. To this day, having fished for almost every kind of a fish that swims, from the Gulf of Mexico almost to Hudson Bay, I have a back-to-boyhood yearning in my memory and disposition that makes me feel the very best fishing in all the world—that is, fishing just for fishing—is to be found in a quiet little cove where the sunfish lie and I expectantly wait to jerk when the cork goes under.

There is a suggestion worth listening to by this hurrying, speed-crazed day of ours in the easy, loitering way of a yellow catfish. He is in no hurry. The water where he is, is just about as wet as the water he could find if he went some other where; so he rests content. I have always believed he was the poet Walt Whitman's favorite. Whitman said in a manner the whole world listened to, "I rest content!" That is the way of a catfish.

I stopped in a strange little roadside restaurant recently which did something to me of far more value than the food I found, though it was exceptionally good. There was no sign in front of the place. The keeper told me he had had a sign once and had had to take it down because he began doing too much business. On the door he had a notice which read, "If you are in a hurry, don't stop here!" Inside we were reassured with another notice, "This place is for those who are not in a hurry." When I stepped in the door, I was infected with the mad hurry of the great streaming highway beside which this strange little eddy of quiet had been

placed. It startled me into the realization of the fact that I was not in such a hurry as I thought I was.

A big, fat, comfortable catfish is the original no-hurry patron. He wastes no flesh hunting food that is already coming his way. If you can float a good bait down where he lies, you will likely hook him.

I have sat by the hour watching the strange way of a trout as in the urgency of instinct it tried and tried and tried again to mount the fall of a cataract, to get high toward the source of the stream where its little ones were to learn in a hidden security the place for their parental return in the days when they in turn would pay the same struggling price to give their little ones the chance they had.

I shoved my canoe into a wilderness lake one day, far away from the beaten pathway of travelers, off the trail of the fisherman, and without name or location on the chart. It was a spot of a sort rare now, where original beauty and wild glory had not been disturbed, where no cottages had ever been built along the shore, where no fisherman had ever whipped the water with an artificial fly, unless it had been some Indian or some hungry woodsman on exploration. As my young son, who knelt in the prow of the canoe, struck his paddle into the clear water, the flash of a startled denizen from under some lily pads caught my eye, and I said, "Did you see that?" We were going nowhere, so I said I believed we were there. I jointed my rod and with the flash of a simple spoon proved my suspicion on the first cast. We had found a wilderness lake full of bass. We almost ended our fascinating wandering right there. Why go farther? Only a bass has the way of a bass in the water.

A "muskie" for a thrill! I have been on the pole end of a fishing line in engagements with almost all sorts of fish. There was

something about the way of a muskellunge that broke my line one day after a contest lasting more than half an hour and left me and my friend who held the oars speechless—and I mean speechless. That's the way of a muskellunge in the water.

The flash of the salmon, the ripple of the mackerel, the leap of the tuna, the lazy loiter of the pickerel, the basking pride of the goldfish, the self-content of the sucker, the ferocity of the garfish, the timidity of the chub, the shimmer of the smelt!

The way of a fish in the water!

VII

The Way of a Snake in the Grass

Photo from Black Star, N. Y.

VII. The Way of a Snake in the Grass

SNAKE in the grass" is a phrase we have long used—uttering it with a bit of a hiss in the voice as we have said it—in withering condemnation of someone we would liken to one who is not to be condoned. He is a snake in the grass! What more needs to be said? Look out!

I would not presume to change the long-accepted figures of speech of our race in one short paragraph. Well do I know the deep-set antipathy toward the whole snake tribe; it seems to be an almost universal attitude, and many pious folks believe it to be a divine injunction. They base their own feeling upon a conviction which has come from primary instruction in the race, and they can give chapter and verse to support their position. They really feel a religious satisfaction which supports their instinctive fear as they bruise the serpent's head.

During my early ministry I came one day to a farmhouse carrying an unusually beautiful specimen of king snake I had picked up along my way. The lady of the house, when I showed her what I had found, produced an exclamation which would not impress one as cordial and told me I was careless with the instruction of the Bible. She had long made claim of being sanctified and rather

resented the low state of grace in which she was compelled to rate her pastor. When I told her I had thought her bit of scripture was a prophetic phrase rather than an injunction, she still held her ground as common sense no matter what preachers said. Anybody should have enough gumption to kill a snake on sight was her position on the whole snake question. And that seems to be one matter of conduct on which an almost universal agreement religious is had. Folks do not like snakes.

The accepted symbol of sin from time immemorial, the snake has had his head bruised in a literal manner by the heel-applying fundamentalism of our sin-cursed race. But whatever he may symbolize, he has a way of his own, and it is a way that has rhythm in it.

From the days of my childhood, when my father taught me the marked differentiations of snakes, I have always been fascinated with the way of a snake in the grass. I have made pets of many and various snakes. Some you can tame in a very few hours; others are more suspicious.

One day while walking along a lonely, lovely path beside a river I became interested in a redbird that in justified rage had attacked a black snake that was threatening the nest. The snake, in his writhing effort to defend himself, fell from the tree into the water and made a much accelerated endeavor to gain the bank where I stood, the frenzied bird meanwhile pounding the swimmer's head in a continuous bombardment that even a snake could never forget. He came ashore just where I was crouched in the path and, free from the bird, rather wearily crawled under me, thinking I looked like a friendly stump. I knew the rare type of black snake he was, and had never before been able to find one in all my snake-hunting trips. The ordinary black snake has a tiny

sharp ridge in the center of every scale. This one wore a skin of smooth scales. He was very quick, and could outrun me through the brush. I was crouched in such a way I could not grab him with any certainty; so I sat down on him, whereupon he quickly bit my leg through the trousers. I pulled him loose and carried him to camp. Every day I tried to disprove the reputation the books had given him as a snake that could not be tamed. I took him from the cage only to be bitten every recurring day for a month, and then decided to set him free, reputation and all. The last I saw of him he was darting through the grass looking for a lonesome place to lie.

A snake! The common opinion is that surely no evidence of worth or beauty could ever be assigned the creature whose name is almost universally mentioned with a shudder. But a few poisonous members of the family have brought ruin to the reputation of them all in the loose-founded general estimation. The vast majority of all the snakes are not only harmless but useful, and should be welcomed in your rat-infested barns and in your insect-threatened gardens. Moreover, upon the lithe, gliding forms of snakes have been set rare loveliness and brilliant color decoration, to go with consummate gracefulness of movement.

Pause observantly and watch a snake move along his way. He is a machine without vibration. There is no shock of leaping footsteps. The whole body moves in perfect relation. The constriction of his long, lithe lateral muscles playing against the curved route he takes is the most perfect example of graceful locomotion that has yet been devised.

"Snake in the grass" is a phrase founded on the noiselessness of a snake's going. You cannot hear his footsteps. He goes quietly. He does not even rustle the grass as he glides along. Not only

does he make no noise in his movement; he cannot be accused of adding any other discordant sound. Aside from the faint warning of the hissing adder and the humorous blow of a bull snake, the ever-suspicious rattlesnake alone offers anything that could be taken as an addition to the noise of a noisy world; and his strange, hissing sort of rattle is a kindly warning to steer others from possible danger. I submit there is something to be said, in this day of the dominion of din, for that which can get about without adding to the clamor of things, without increasing the decibels of this raucous hour.

If you choose to insult the snake by likening him to the sneak, you might likewise compliment him upon being so quiet, for it is his way. He does not run. He glides. He is never in collision. He always glances off. He moves silently along his winding way, easily the most graceful of all the creatures who sojourn about this earth.

The way of a snake in the grass!

VIII

The Way of a Bee at a Flower

VIII. The Way of a Bee at a Flower

WHENEVER I see a bee at a flower, I know a bee could not be were it not for a flower, and I know also the flower could not get on without a bee. They are made for each other. The lure of the honey is the guarantee of the flower's fruition. The bee must go wading leg-deep in the pollen if it is to extract the nectar. On the feet of its quest must be carried the propagation of its field of conquest for tomorrow. The way of a bee at a flower is both the way of a thief and of a benefactor, and the accounts balance.

Strange it is how some very little thing will nestle down in our remembrance and remain there in a never-fading freshness. As a boy I saw at the end of a chapter in a book a little sketch of two sparrows hopping across a lawn to read a sign placed there, "Keep off the grass." One of the sparrows said to the other, "Whose grass is this anyhow?" Now I suppose for days such as these, when illustrations are common, such a picture would never be given a place; and the telling of such a boyhood memory may be of scant interest to many. But the fact that it remains with me does signify something. I never read that sign on any lawn anywhere but the remembrance of the conversation of those little assumptive owners of all grass comes to mind. I saw a sign in a

Photo by Ewing Galloway, N. Y.

lovely garden, "Don't touch the flowers," and the bees were wading down into the heart of every bloom. Whose flowers are these anyhow? The universal ownership of all bloom is the claim of the whole bee-tribe.

Robert Browning, in the exercise of what we kindly define as poetic license, made a strange grouping of comparative concentrations of value when he set a bee, a gem, and a pearl in a trio of auditing that has caught wide recognition:

> All the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee:
> All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one gem:
> In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea.

I would not seem to dispute the poet. I knew all the time that little pilferer of sweetness carried a full bag of his favorite plunder, but I saw a million of them at work on a clover field and began to wonder as I read Browning's estimate of one bee's baggage just how many ages of real breath and bloom were being carried out of there. I went home and smeared a hot biscuit with a liberal measure of what we had plundered from the hive, and tried to figure out how many ages of breath and bloom I had in me, thanks to the busy bee.

I have the estimate of one of the great honey refineries that it takes the nectar of six million blossoms for bees to produce one pound of honey. Let Mr. Browning and the honey merchants settle that.

When I was a boy, a certain fascination for what we called a "bee tree" kept us on the constant lookout for evidence of the location. We devised an interesting and quite accurate method of finding out where the bees of a field were storing their sweetness. We would capture several bees, well laden and ready for the

homegoing, and liberate them from the box, one at a time, from several different positions thereabouts; and, marking carefully the routes they took, we easily established lines that crossed each other, thereby locating, with a really interesting accuracy, the neighborhood of the hive. The way of the bee is straight. He flies in a beeline when he is going home. To be sure, we found most of the lines leading us to regular beehives whose contents were already contracted for. But not infrequently we did locate thus a bee tree, which of itself composed a whole chapter in that summer's story of the boy life of that locality, or disclosed to us some not too gracious old farmer who thanked us, with orders, for having located a swarm he had lost.

I have wondered if the bee does not have a secret to be discovered by this winged age of ours. It might interest those who may not have realized it, that the fastest creature known is a kind of bee. It looks quite like a honey bee, though it is nearer related to the botfly. It wears a long name given to it by some scientific carelessness in nomenclature, as cephenomyia. It is not common, though not rare, and is native to Brazil. It flies habitually in high altitudes, gathers speed very quickly, and stops almost instantly. How to explain the material resistance its gauzelike wings have to meet is beyond human estimation, for this strange creature of two wings attains a speed almost twice as fast as the fastest planes yet made. It has been described by two of our best naturalists of today as mechanically a perfect flying machine.

One backward spring there happened in my yard, not known as a flower garden, a tragedy that caught my interest. Several times that year we thought spring had arrived, only to be disappointed by some new insistence of a reluctant winter's retirement. Long overdue, a little, long-dormant, and all but discouraged hyacinth

bulb decided to go ahead anyhow. It sent up a scant green leaf and risked erecting a most inconspicuous green mast upon which it might dare to fly a flower. That little bloom I shall always remember and rate as the least hyacinthy hyacinth I have ever seen. There were just two little scraggly blossoms that dared appear. They were so poor and pale that none of my neighbors knew I had a flower in my yard, though it was in my front flowerbed.

A bumblebee found it, however. So far as I knew, it was the only flower outside protecting windows anywhere in our town. I have never thought it was strange that a bee could find a field of clover. Who couldn't? But how could a bee find the one little unfragrant and obscure bloom standing in my frostbitten yard?

The air was chill, and the snow fell again that night, but the next morning the bee was still at my flower. It was the only flower to be found, and he had found it. I thought he was dead, but as long as he clung to the cordiality of the snow-standing bloom I was interested to leave him there.

The sun came out that day, and shone brightly and encouragingly, and even resurrectingly it seemed to me, on both bloom and bee. To my amazed interest the bee moved from one to the other of the two tiny flowers. How much honey, if any, it may have found would have cramped Browning's broad estimate to declare. The third morning I found it dead with the dead flower. It had come to the one flower to be found, and died in the right place anyhow.

The way of a bee at a flower!

IX

The Way of the Wind in the Trees

IX. The Way of the Wind in the Trees

THE wind! The wind! Whoever named the wind selected the right word. It sounds like it. Some words do not seem to be well chosen. The word "wind" is a masterpiece. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth." The wind! The wind! The wind!

I was born and grew into manhood in a country where the wind had a real chance to blow. If you have never companioned with the wind on the prairie, you have never really been out with the wind. How it does come in an unhindered, billowing way across the prairie! Not even at sea does it do so well. The sea gets all ruffled up and in a tossing protest for having been bothered makes a bold barricade against it. The wind on the prairie is the wind let loose on its proving ground. You will never know how the wind can blow until you have stood out in it on the wide prairie.

The only objection I ever felt to a prairie wind was that I could not look straight at it. It had always picked up so many things to hurl into my staring eyes that I had to get what vision I could of it with a squint; and you cannot look, even at an unseeable wind,

Photo by Ewing Galloway, N. Y.

effectively with a squint. I always wanted to open my eyes wide and look at the wind. One of the many joys that came to me while I lived at the head of Lake Superior, the most beautiful body of water God has tucked amid the wildernesses of this world, was to go often and stand on the shore when the wind was up-lake, and look straight into it with wide-opened eyes. Looking at the wind!

But a wind with nothing to blow upon is merely a wind. It takes a tree to furnish a real harp for the wind, and the timbre of the tone it makes there is the secret of the tree. Send a strong wind through a grove of trees, and if there is any sense of music in your soul you will be entranced. It is like unto a master seated at a great organ.

Listen to the wind in the trees. That is, of course, the poverty of the wind on prairie or on sea; it has nothing to play upon. Someone has suggested that there are two ways to appreciate trees. One is to be where they are and know them thoroughly. The other is to be where they are not and realize how poor their absence makes the landscape. The wind needs the trees; without them it is like a musician who has lost his instrument.

The wind in the trees is as distinct and characteristic in action and tone as are the species of the trees it plays upon. A real lover of trees at midnight in a strange location can tell the kinds of trees that stand about him as he listens to the aeolian music of the passing breeze.

There is as much difference in the songs of the trees as there is in the songs of the birds. We have not been really good listeners to the music of the wind in the trees. If you think you can make distinction of the crisp, crackling song of a happy little dickcissel singing in the brush by the roadside and the measured croak of an

old black crow from a dead treetop mid-field, then must you realize likewise that the songs of the trees are as different as are the make-up of the trees themselves. If we but had ears keen enough, we could discern every member of the arboreal orchestra in the strains of the ceaseless symphony.

Surely none of you have been unmindful of the characteristic music of a great pine tree on a rocky hillside. Its stiff needles make a million modulations, but it is all the music of the pine. I fancy I can tell a white pine from a Norway, and I know you could not deceive me in the massed music of a jack-pine forest.

There is a distinct sound of a cottonwood. It is produced by the masterful balance of the sensitive leaves. They make impressive tremolo that cannot be mistaken if you really know your trees.

Listen to the strident strains of a tall, ragged spruce; the steady, deep groan of an oak; the violin offerings of an elm; the plaintive tone of an aspen; the shriek of the locust; and, as a scriptural writer has put it, "the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees."

The wind in the trees!

There is a temperamental manner, as well as tone, of peculiar impressiveness in the wind in the winter trees. The strings of nature's harp seem to be in a distinctly responsive mood in winter. The leaves of the deciduous trees all shorn off and blown away, the bare winter woods become tuned to the crescendo of the whole year's symphony. There is a strident wail that goes whining along a hedgerow blown across by a February wind which is a rendition not to be heard any other where, or at any other time. I wonder if, had I but keen enough ears, I would not be calendar-conscious as I listen to the trees. The sound of February in a stark elm has little resemblance to the soothing sounds that breathe

from it in June when it is in full dress. Impressively characteristic is the music of autumn, when at every gust the dead leaves fall. October plays its own opus. There is a tremolo in every tone resultant from the falling leaves that is far more perfect than any *vox humana* contrivance ever set in an organ.

But the way of the wind in the trees is not all a matter for ears. There is a strange charm for the eye as well when the wind engages a tree.

I love to watch the wind in a wrestling match with a tree. What skill and trickery and proud strength seem to be displayed! How individually a tree does act in the wind! I know a rugged old pine tree standing on a great ledge of rock, with clinging roots long holden to those unshakable hillsides, which seems defiantly to dare the winds to come on. I know a bending willow that bows before every wind to let it go in harmlessness by.

There is a fascination in watching the wind, sometimes playing, and sometimes testing, and sometimes in evident fury bent upon discovery of every rotten-hearted pretender standing like a hypocrite among the trees.

The willow is the champion compromiser. It takes whatever terms are offered in courteous submission and seldom breaks, though very fragile, having risked no resistance. The oak stands stiff and defiant, in confidence that it has laid closely the fiber of its strength, and seems to court a fight with any wind by sheer strength. The elm has confidence in a poetic gracefulness which always seems able to take either breeze or blast and master it in the side-stepping manner of a skilled diplomat. Well do I remember a very tall, signal-standing row of Lombardy poplars out on the Kansas prairie. Their high-held hands were ideal grips for the wind to lay hold on. How they did swing and sway like a

parade of pompous drum majors! In a storm I would watch them in expectant interest. I was always proud of them after the wind had gone by and the tall sentinels stood again head-high victors.

The wind is sad and restless,
  And cursed with an inward pain;
You may hark as you will, by valley or hill,
  But you hear it still complain.

It wails on the barren mountain,
  It shrieks on the winter seas,
It sobs in the cedars and moans in the pine,
  And shudders all over the trees.[1]

The way of the wind in the trees!

[1] Bayard Taylor.

X

The Way of a Seed in the Soil

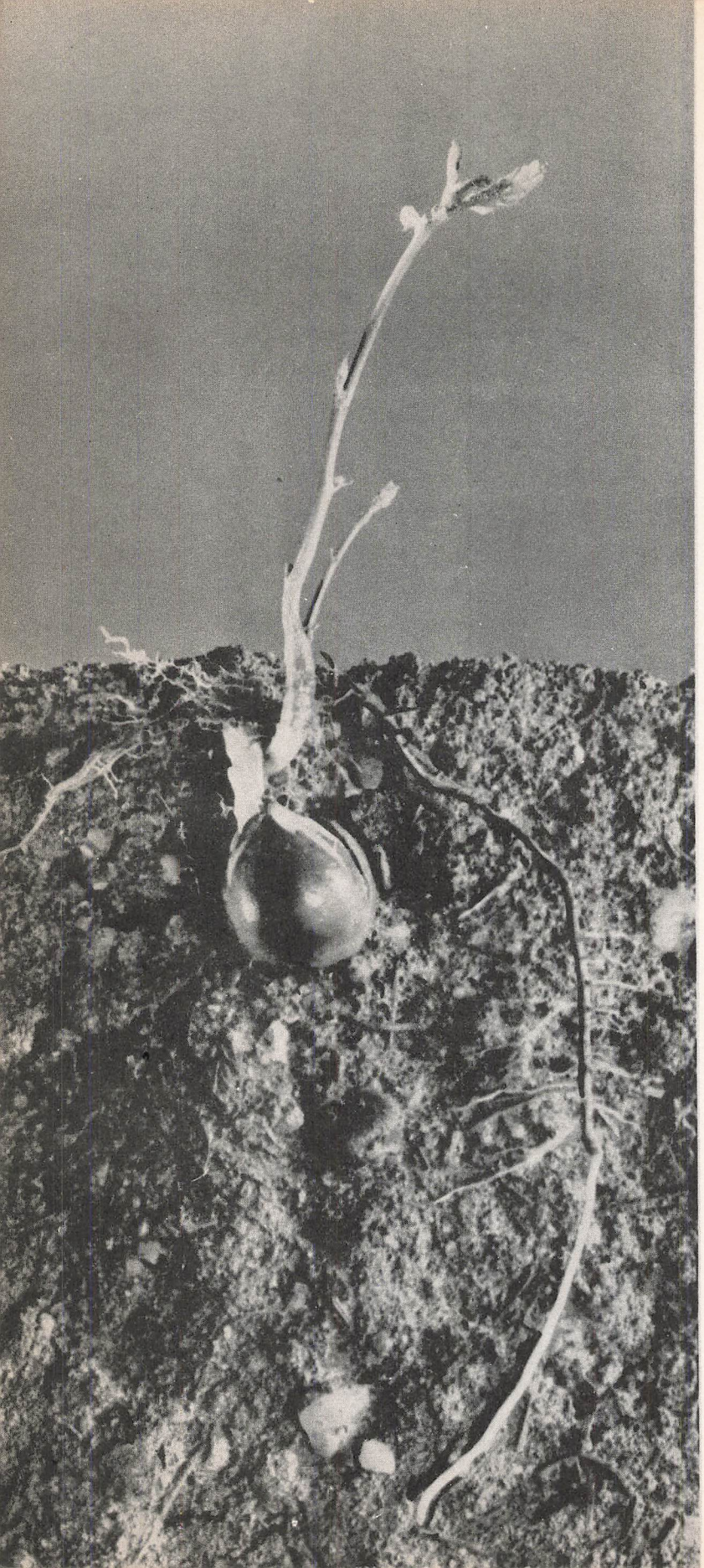


Photo from Black Star, N. Y.

X. *The Way of a Seed in the Soil*

HOW I wish I knew the way of a seed as it falls into the soil and dies! "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body." Paul did wonderfully well with his great illustration in his famous chapter on immortality. The involved mystery of that soil-sown seed, however, leaves me, after I have read the illustration, just as foolish before the fact as I was.

Had I the poetry in me with which Tennyson framed his lovely little address to the flower he plucked from a crannied wall, furnishing a speech for many a puzzled wanderer ever since—

> If I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is—

I say, if in me were the genius that could frame such a word at a flower, I would have long since shaped into kindred expression the marvel I feel as I look at a seed Any seed. A seed confounds me.

Years ago, when I was a young man in college, I heard Dr. Frank Gunsaulus use an illustration in a lecture. He told how one spring day he took a black, ill-shaped thing and stuck it in the soil beside the back fence in his yard. He went on his way and left the dead-looking thing in the damp, dark earth. One day it seemed, so far as his ability to explain was involved, that a miracle had happened. Out of that little black mystery box there sprang a green sprout. Day by day it climbed up the unseen ladder of light to a height taller than the man who had put it there. The miracle grew. Then one day, at the top of the green mast it had built up, there burst into bloom a great yellow sunflower. The miracle had greatened, and he who had set that seed in that soil was compelled to say miracle of miracles when in the heart of that bloom he found a handful of the very same strange things he had hidden in the soil weeks before. The miracle of a seed!

Some years ago my friend Dr. William L. Stidger wrote one of his best poems with the title "The Seed Is in the Clod." I cut it from the paper where it first appeared, and since he has used some of my stories I am going to presume on his willingness to allow me to take out only a few lines of a poem every line of which is masterfully done.

The seed is in the clod, my friend,
  The sun is in the sky;
The world may rock with turbulence,
  But God is standing by.

. . . . . .

The seed is in the clod, my friend,
  Nor shall it ever die;
Though weak and fearful human wrecks
  In abject sloth we lie.

The Way of a Seed in the Soil

The seed of hope, and faith and love;
  Of Brotherhood, sublime,
Was shot into our human frames
  Before the dawn of time.

The rose shall blossom from the muck
  In God's good time and day;
The seed is in the clod, oh world,
  And Faith will have its way!

In preaching a Thanksgiving Day sermon a good many years ago, I indulged myself in the use of an illustration which I suppose almost all preachers have used. Whatever I sought to make clear by the story I do not now know, but I told the well-worn tale of how some archaeologists had found some wheat in the long-dead hands of an Egyptian mummy. For literally thousands of years that strange little germ had awaited its day. When it was put in the kindly soil, the patient germ sprang to life and brought forth fruit. After the services my brother, who was walking home with me, commented in a calm estimate of my sermon by saying, "That illustration of the wheat is interesting. The only thing the matter with it is that it is not true." I answered that I had both heard it used by speakers and read accounts of it accompanied by pictures of growing wheat impressively named "miracle wheat" and said that such a slight matter about an illustration might be worth looking up.

In my church at the time was one of the nation's foremost bacteriologists, head of the department of bacteriology in one of the world's greatest laboratories. I sought him out and told him of my awakened interest in the germinal life of a seed. Together we started an investigation which before we had finished had reached

almost every laboratory and seed experimental station in all lands. I have an impressive bundle of the findings yet.

Ordinary seed are not long-lived; wheat is one of the shorter-lived of our grains. Of course the longest-lived of all our seed will be some form of hard-shelled nut. I believe the evidence is in favor now of the little round black nut that fills the pod of the water lily as the longest-living seed we have.

The genius of the life of the seed is not to be sought in its longevity but in the response it makes to the lure of the soil. We must believe that for over fifty centuries now the life that was in a tiny seed of a tree, wind-blown into a sheltered spot to find germination, has come on and on to win for itself today the reputation of being the oldest living thing on this earth. Since that *Sequoia gigantea* sprang to life, it has waved its living boughs over the passings of great nations and civilizations, and stands calmly awaiting now the passing of this our nation-shaking hour.

One day in flying across Ohio a great Navy dirigible met with a desperate disaster. The nation was grieved in the death of fourteen noble men. The commander, Zachary Lansdowne, wore the highly prized class ring from Annapolis, and it was lost in the great holocaust of the wreckage. The ring was made the object of intensive search, and a good reward was offered to the finder. Thousands of people tramped over the ground. The government raised a memorial monument upon the site. Two years after the accident a lady by the name of Larrison, weeding in her garden within a few steps of the monument, noticed the shine of something on a branch of a mustard plant and discovered hanging there the long-sought ring, picked up by a mustard seed and lifted high that it might be found.

Who knows the way of a seed in the soil?

The Way of a Seed in the Soil

For many years one of the show things we had in Michigan, before which constantly stopped the wondering passers-by, was a huge granite boulder into a tiny crevice of which one day there had nestled a tiny seed that, with its insistent power of life, had actually split that rock asunder and built a lovely tree in the crack.

All the world knows about, and many of us have stood in interest to look upon, the quiet but effectual rebuke the growing seed gave to the bold declaration of the dead unbeliever in the graveyard in Hamburg. Breaking the great stone asunder and literally toppling the daring disbelief out of its living way, that little seed, not subject to human instructions, built its silent rebuke above the dead atheist.

> There is no unbelief;
> Whoever plants a seed beneath the sod
> And waits to see it push away the clod—
> He trusts in God.[1]

When I first read the very interesting account Charles Darwin gives of the number of seed he was able to germinate from one little ball of mud taken from the tiny foot of a sparrow captured along a country hedgerow, I began to wonder if anyone has ever made a real collection of seed. I have never seen one. I have never heard of one. If I were not so busy preaching, I think I would start such a collection now.

The world has through all the ages made its living largely by eating certain familiar seed. I wonder if in our obvious harvests we have not neglected and overlooked many perhaps even more valuable seed than we have made use of. If Emerson's definition of a weed as "a plant we have not yet discovered the use of" be

[1] Lizzie York Case.

correct, it may be that there is available in our treatment of weeds a much better system of conservation rather than destruction. The very persistence of some so-called weeds which mankind has been trying to destroy ever since our first farmer was turned out of his God-tended garden may be an argument of hidden values which someday we will be grateful for. I hold no brief for ragweeds, or some of the other despised things along my pathway; but they are persistent, to say the least. Only of late have observers begun to sing the praises of dandelions and milkweed, to make me wonder how really destructive of genuine values I have been all my life as I have gone slashing with my little hoe. Maybe I would do better if in my remaining days I would hang up my hoe and get a harvester.

Once in a golden hour
I cast to earth a seed.
Up there came a flower,
The people said, a weed.[2]

Elinor Hoyt Wylie wrote a "Hymn to Earth," some lines of which well conclude this rambling little chapter about the mysterious wonder we call a seed:

Farewell, incomparable element,
Whence man arose, where he shall not return;
And hail, imperfect urn
Of his last ashes, and his firstborn fruit;
Farewell, the long pursuit,
And all the adventures of his discontent.

. . . . . .

[2] Tennyson.

The Way of a Seed in the Soil

Hail, element of earth, receive thy own,
And cherish, at thy charitable breast,
This man, this mongrel beast:
He plows the sand, and, at his hardest need,
He sows himself for seed.

XI

The Way of a Bug

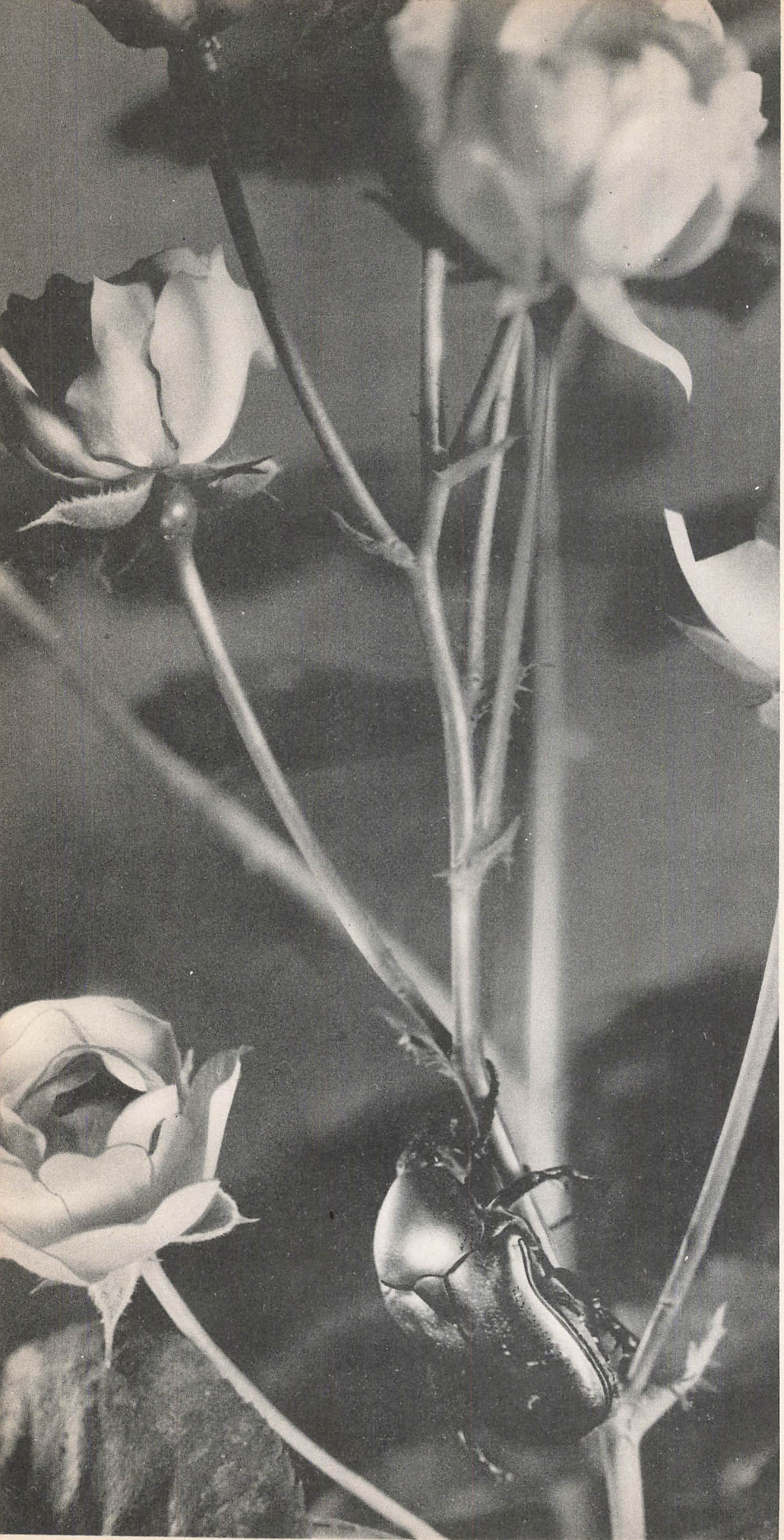


Photo from Black Star, N. Y.

XI. *The Way of a Bug*

UNLESS you insist on some selective definition of the word, a bug is the nearest to a universal living thing we have around this world. I have no statistics from otherwhere. You will meet some sort of bug everywhere you go. He flies, he swims, he crawls. You will find a bug at the sweet heart of your fairest flower; you will find one of another taste satisfied with the foulness of the most repulsive filth. The bug is an earthly universal.

One of our scientific observers has told us that bugs were upon this earth long before man arrived. In fact they were on the reception committee awaiting our coming, and indeed were doing some essential things that were to be done. Such a fact may, however, be of no more interest than the forward expectancy which is willing to announce, with a tone of certainty in the prophecy, that, as among the first, they will surely be the last creatures to survive in the evidence of life on this sometime disappearing world. I sometimes try to fancy just what the lonesome last melancholy bug will look like, to whatever eye may be available from anywhere to see—the last earthly survivor, riding this abandoned derelict of a world, polishing the final sensitiveness of his little antennae in the closing darkness of the final curtain.

Somewhere among his paragraphs William Dean Howells has a quite melancholy self-estimate in the *reductio ad absurdum* terminology of comparative importance of himself and an ordinary bug. He suggests that when the little din his life has made shall have died away, if there happens to be anyone who has been curious enough to investigate what the little noise he has made may have been, it will be found to have come from a very small insect of a creature scraping around on the surface of things trying to find out what they mean, and all for the sake of other insects larger or smaller. I would not engage in any controversy with Mr. Howells as to the comparative importance of human life on this earth, but as a mere survivor against whatever death may mean on this mortal sphere I must recognize the liability of the persistent bug and leave to a later trial-balance the real estimation of the value of having kept the final watch of life here.

A bug! The very word seems to have been framed in contempt. Whoever coined that word seemed to know how to condense contempt into the fewest letters. A bug! If anything of beauty is ever to be found in possession of a bug it would surely be but testimony that he had pilfered it somewhere in his unlicensed prowling. A bug is a bug, so speaks the unobservant looker. He need but pause to see and be confounded not only at the seemingly endless variety of design but at the richness of texture and color.

There are bugs and bugs. No more brilliant colors are to be found on flowers or birds than are to be seen on the brilliant and grotesque forms of bugs. You cannot contemplate the rich sheaths of the golden apple beetle and the tiger beetle or the varied beauty of the ladybird beetle without wondering to what mine of color they had access and who set the design they wear.

Coleoptera, with their sheath wings, were to me from my boy-

hood the most fascinating of all the insect life, and many the interesting days I spent as a boy in field and woods bug hunting. My collection, which I finally gave to my college, may have been of scant value to the scientific story of the world; but I was hunting for my own interest, and my first estimate of the real value of a new electric arc light which came to our town was its great attraction for bugs. It saved me a great deal of traveling. The bugs came to me. I sat in the road under the swinging light—what traffic there was would turn out for a boy then—and the stunned bugs that plunged out of the darkness into the lamp rained down into my lap.

To discover, by myself, some new and strangely balanced design on the artistically shaped back of a beetle was the very essence of the real joy of discovery. The perfection of detail of the adornment of a tiny bug that would never be noticed by the bug-careless world has always fascinated me.

Why make a bug so? Who would ever waste beauty on a bug? It was in trying to make me an answer to such questions that I came to satisfy my curiosity with the conclusion that this is my Father's world. I never found in my boy language the phrase of Maltbie Babcock's song, but it was the answer I deduced. Little did I care whether or no my answer was acceptable to others. I found in the most humble things in nature a fondness which I will now risk estimate upon, in gratitude, as increased because I could not afford other interests than those I could go out and find, and which I realize came to be basic in my recognition and appreciation of God's detailed care of his world. Things all about me—even the bugs, almost universally unnoticed—carry the skilled evidence of infinite design.

In an ordinary walk along any country lane you will pass by

more kinds and varieties of insects than there are species of mammals in all creation. There seems to be no bound to the variations of insects. I have just read a fascinating book by Dr. Frank Lutz in which he has sustained an estimate he once made, to the surprise and disbelief of a scientific audience, that in his own small home lot, fifty feet wide and two hundred feet deep, located in the center of a suburban town, he was caring for a company of five hundred different kinds of insects. It is not an insect farm either. He has the rather a prize-taking garden. Upon the challenge of the doubt, or really disbelief, of his hearers, to satisfy himself and convince all others, he up to the time of the publishing of the book found and recorded one thousand four hundred and two species, of twenty-six orders; and there are doubtless many more who are inclined to be census dodgers, whose names will yet be added. He calls his book *A Lot of Insects,* and proves it.

We have a very interesting request, even unto the dimension of an advertisement long before the "want ads" had become available. In Greece, which was no worse than otherwhere, Aristophanes sent out his appeal four hundred years before Christ, "I am looking for lodging, free from bugs and fleas, if possible, if you know any such." It is not recorded, so far as I am aware, that he found what he sought.

Man has been in a fight with bugs all his days. Just at present what we call a world war has the front page monopolized, as we wonder and fear for the survival outcome. There are those in the business of the destruction of human enemies who are proposing the enlistment of the vast hordes of deadly bugs. Schemes are proposed to propagate and spread crop pests across the world's harvest fields. Someone has dared to prophesy that if mankind does invoke the aid of insects and microorganisms, it is not at all unlikely

that the bug will emerge the ultimate victor and the strange picture I dared to suggest above as the final world scene will thus be hastened to its realization.

Recently in one of the lecture rooms of New York University there arose an impossible din, a crashing, crackling, rumbling as of some huge machinery. In from the hall came protesting the students from the adjoining room, who could not hear the words of their teacher. To the amazement of the protesters, who expected to find upon entrance some huge noise-producing machinery, they were met by the calm assurance of Dr. E. E. Free, their interesting chemist and physicist, that the noise which had annoyed them was only the sound of some young weevils eating their way out of wheat grains amplified by a new device he had made. He said the purr of a cat magnified to the same scale could be heard three thousand miles. They kept the cats out, however.

Maybe in all our modern equipment for observation we are making intolerably big the noises of the tiny bugs. With the huge magnification of our ever-increasingly powerful microscopes we are bringing out the details on the faces of bugs our fathers never even so much as saw; and the hideous-looking features of some of these small inhabitants about, and on, and within us, cannot be conducive to the peace and quiet of those of us who must be told the creatures are after us. The plain fact for all of us is that none of us would present a very comfortable appearance if the faces we wear were magnified several thousand diameters.

We may be fighting what is to be our final fight with bugs, as some late writers contend. However, we need not fear that there is at all a unified command and harmony among those hordes of bugs. There is strife and hatred and war to the death within their ranks. We can well cultivate the friendship and help of some,

because of what they will do to others. Years ago Jonathan Swift in a play of humor set forth facts without realizing how perfectly they would be confirmed by the scientific findings of our microscope-eyed day:

> So, Nat'ralists observe, a Flea
> Hath smaller Fleas that on him prey;
> And these have smaller still to bite 'em,
> And so proceed *ad infinitum*.

Dr. Lutz tells how he welcomes some bugs to eat a few flowers in his garden, and how he studiously selects and plants some flowers for them, just to have them around.

There are bugs, and bugs.

XII

The Way of a Cloud in the Sky

XII. *The Way of a Cloud in the Sky*

THERE is something about a cloud in the sky that always has seemed to me a relief from the oppressiveness of the overwhelming fact of the boundlessness of space. Somehow to a little mind, such as the one I have to live with, the thought of boundlessness savors not of cordiality. I am naturally a rather friendly sort of creature, and there is nothing of intimacy implied in space and more space.

There is a strange affliction which knowing ones call claustrophobia. Folks who boast of such a long-named distress imagine they are confined within smothering latitudes and have not room to breathe. He who will walk out under the open sky will not suffer from claustrophobia, though there is real liability of agoraphobia, which is the affliction of fear at open spaces. I personally have never been willing to confess such a malady, though the scientists of late have been bringing into the expanse of whatever we mean by the infinite new discoveries that have at least not left me with any smothering sensation. The astronomer, with his increasing lenses, has been adding so rapidly to the bounds of the seeable that his figures, even though he fancies he can state them with an increase of ciphers in comprehensible terminology, do nothing to my feelings but increase my agoraphobia.

Photo by Ewing Galloway, N. Y.

I grew up in a country where the geography lies down flat and is rimmed with a horizon as far as one can see. There was just as much sky available as there was sky to avail. No intruding mountains shoved themselves in to compromise my boyhood skies. The sky was the sky. We never talked of "patches of the sky," as I have heard folks speak who live with even the heavens parceled out. I was brought up with the sense of the open spaces in my soul.

The science of these inquiring days has been compelling us all to domesticate ourselves to a new universe. It is of no use to subject Galileo to torture as a fear-struck process for adjusting a poorly stated theology with the facts. The truth of God is always comfortable before any fact.

Pascal, who made use of one of the greatest brains mortality ever lent a man in this world, said one day that the eternal silence of infinite space terrified him. It was a touch of agoraphobia which seized him. I make no claim of a mind which would look any other than ridiculous by comparison with Pascal's, but I do refuse to be terrorized at what has been called "the awful homeless spaces," for I have faith in God.

> I will storm the black bastions of night,
> I will tread where my vision has trod,
> I will set in the darkness a light,
> In the vastness I cling to my god.[1]

The cloud in the sky has always seemed to me to set companionship and sociability across the vastness of space. Of course I know it is near, a sojourner in the narrow confines of our thin, clinging atmosphere; but there it rides in its ever-changing adaptation to wind or weather, a wanderer across my sky that seems always to

[1] Don Marquis.

bring me a companionship of the heavens I could not have were it not for this usher along the high aisles of the open cathedral above me.

Whoever may have written that strangely popular song we all sing, with a feigned homesick tone, about our "home on the range, where . . . . the skies are not cloudy all day," may have set for many a really singable song, but he was singing about the wrong thing out there. It was skies that were cloud-filled we were looking for.

Let not the cloud be given the reputation of depression. Poets have for long made it so, using it as crepe for the days that are dark and dreary, and even trying to speak in hopeful terminology of "silver linings."

How dull the sky would be if it were cloudless! Blank space to sink your sightless vision into with no relief but the blue depth of its incomputable distance would be bound to make us all victims of chronic agoraphobia. So God spread clouds across the sky, and again made of a necessity one of his rare wonders of beauty, just as he did when he provided for the function of reproduction the myriad loveliness of the flowers.

There go the clouds! The argosies of the sky, sailing to their unknown ports on their uncharted sea! The flagship of the fleet is a huge cumulus with full sails spread, easily the glory of the day sky, the most majestic of all the clouds. The nimbus, the stratus, the cirrus, the alto-cumulus are other ceaseless navigators of the heavens above.

I have companioned with the clouds ever since I was a boy, and used to race with their cooling shadows down the gentle slope of Perley's Hill. The outcome of the race depended altogether on the velocity of the winds they had their sails spread before; it was

a varying game I never tired of, but which constantly tired me out.

I do not know much about the clouds, at least as specialists of our weather these well-informed days do. My sky-tilted look is a matter of affection rather than wisdom, and my continued interest in the ceaseless variation with which God makes up every day's heaven above me grows from little knowledge except the realization that never again will I see it repeated.

Tenderest of all the books Bishop William A. Quayle ever wrote is his *A Book of Clouds,* which was not allowed the exposure of printing till he had gone—for the reason that it is flavored in the soul of a lonely boy who had never seen his mother and, in his boyhood fancy yearning upward for her, came to see the clouds. At one place in that volume, in noting the ceaseless variety of the clouds, he says " 'Thanks to the good God for J. W. M. Turner' is the import of many a thanks I have offered when looking at his skies sown to the clouds that God made, and Turner first of all men saw." I would not dispute his estimate of Turner. I accept it, and have spent much time gazing at that artist's glorious canvases. I think I understand the import of the well-worn story of his reply to the dull-eyed critic who complained, "I have never seen anything like that," and was met with the complete answer, "Don't you wish you could!" I have always felt, however, that the unpaintable glories of the sky are their own comment upon the inadequacy of even man's highest genius. I need not worry that I cannot afford a Turner canvas in my little dwelling place; out every window I have a vision that is real, and ceaseless in variety.

I had a strange man come to see me one day to show 365 canvases he had painted out the window of his study, one each day for a year. I had no money to buy his pictures, and told him to hurry back, for the next year was leap year and he could get an extra pic-

ture. He made me realize, however, that my window was the best picture in my house, and that if I would treat it as it deserved I would frame it in the finest molding I could buy. So in my Turnerless room I sit content to see the open sky and watch the clouds go by.

There go the clouds!

XIII

"His Hand the Wonders Wrought"

XIII. *"His Hand the Wonders Wrought"*

NOT long before he died into the great life in which he so profoundly, and to all the rest of us so helpfully, believed, the great scientist Michael Pupin declared, in an interview that was very widely published across the world: "If science does not assist me to give myself and others a better religion, a better understanding of the Creator, and a closer personal relationship with him; if science does not assist me in carrying out the divine purpose, then I am a failure as a scientist. But science has made me a better Christian; I believe it will make better Christians of all men and women who try to understand its simple and beautiful laws, because they are the laws of God."

Knowledge is indeed a great evangelist. Let no one praise ignorance. I was told recently of an old man who, misled by a false accusation of education from someone who gloried in the fact that he had "never learned any better than to believe in God," in the enthusiasm of a prayer, both defensive and offensive, cried out: "O God, we thank thee we are 'ignorant'; make us 'ignoranter.' " Let us not fancy that ignorance is safe for anybody. The God of a world like this has nothing to hide. His worship is not to be

propagated in darkness. Truth is never in collision with truth. God is truth!

The world of today offers a thousand times more evidence of the hand that made it than the world our grandfathers knew. Not that the world has changed, but that we have found it out. Every new lens we have added to our vision, whether to peer farther into the infinite vast, or to see more deeply into the wonder-filled minute, but brings increasingly convincing testimony of the divine hand that wrought it all.

Long ago someone said—and a whole world caught it so eagerly as a universal truth that no one seems to be sure just who said it first—"An undevout astronomer is mad." The increasing knowledge of mankind is preparing us for a modern revision of this judgment which will leave out any restriction to one group and declare its racewide inclusiveness—that no one can wade about a world in a universe like this and lay good claim to sanity who does not recognize God over all.

We are never going to be able to frame a formula of such mathematical scope as to contain God, nor will the logician with his little syllogism find premise with which to state him. However, every increasing knowledge we may gain in the endless acquisition that is before us, instead of taking God out of the world, the rather is bound to bring mankind into closer relation to him. This is our Father's world.

With a compelled faith like that, real knowledge is not afraid to proceed into whatever is ahead. Upon the gravestone under which lie the mortal desertions of one of the noblest workmen and observers we have ever had and his companion of happy and long years, John and Phoebe Brashear, have been carved, at their re-

quest, these fine fearless words of faith: "We have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night."

The great scientist whom I just quoted, Michael Pupin, left us his humble testimony at the height of his very high career in knowledge, "My religion does not contradict a single element of the religion which my mother, and the people of my native village, held when I was a boy. Science has simply brought to me a higher, broader view of the Creator."

I am not troubled over the at times rather bold denouncement of miracles. I have gone wading about in miracles all my life. We may have to keep a quite up-to-date revision of our definition of what we mean by miracle. The seeming miracle of yesterday has become the commonplace of today. Who is going to decide just where the ordinary stops, and the miraculous begins?

I know that there are miracles,
For I have seen
The granite ledges of the lonely hills
Where shadows lean
Against the sky and Spring's low fires
Burn swift away,
Change into beauty holy as the hour
When thrushes pray—
I've seen the mountain laurel glow
Upon the height—
Eternal beauty's shining word
That God alone can write![1]

Who am I anyhow to dare go blundering about in my ignorance and make use of any such word as "miraculous"? It is framed only to fit my tiny knowledge. For long I thought I had said something about the small things when I talked about an atom.

[1] Arthur W. Peach.

We were so sure we knew that we leaped to conclude our finding by declaring the atom to be the foundation stone of creation. Now come the new discoveries that speak in terms of protons and electrons and neutrons and make the atom huge. As for me, I go about my Father's world in a constant and increasing wonder; sure of my ignorance, I would not care for any to think me so presumptuous as even to try to define the miraculous. I go floundering about in a flood of wonder and am challenged at every step of my way, not by the miraculous, but by my ignorance amid the unknown.

They have just now brought out a new microscope making use of electronic rays by which we can just about see the invisible, as we magnify it by a hundred thousand diameters. Through it a grain of mustard seed, which has a pretty good authority for being rather limited in size, would now assume the proportion of the Empire State Building. So I incline to believe that some of these days we will find out something we have never known.

The brain specialists have recently quieted me down mentally by stating that they have found the human brain has in it from ten to fourteen billion cells. When you consider there are lines connecting these cells each with all, you will be satisfied with your sense of complexity to know that the approximate number of such connections in your mental switchboard would be expressed by the first digit followed by fifteen million ciphers. This small figure they tell me is a conservative figure, and comprehends only the cerebral cortex or outer layer of the brain.

I simply make note of this now in order to impress you with the feeling I have, that I do not need to go even beyond the confines of my own little brain to be so awe-struck with the handiwork of him who made it as to hush any suggestion that I would know

what could lay claim to being miraculous in a world like this. Everywhere I look I am convinced that

> The great world's altar-stairs
> . . . . slope thro' darkness up to God.[2]

I have just been reading about, and wondering over, the super-beauty of the microscopic, single-celled creatures belonging to the group called radiolarians. The deep seas of the tropics teem with these tiny creatures. When they die, they sink to the bottom and form the ooze which lies on the ocean depths. To try to think of the complex loveliness of the actual content of such slime was somewhat of a shock to what I had always thought about slime. When Ruskin startled the world by an analysis of the despised mud of London streets he scraped from his boots as he walked into his study, and found the stuff of our fairest gems in the filth we had despised, he made preparatory approach for us now to learn the indescribable loveliness of slime.

"This is my Father's world!" From diamonds to slime, from microbes to mammoths, from amoebas to men, God's hand the wonders wrought.

> 'Tis not in the high stars alone,
> Nor in the cups of budding flowers,
> Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,
> Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,
> But in the mud and scum of things
> There alway, alway, something sings.[3]

"This is my Father's world!"

[2] Tennyson.
[3] Emerson.